

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE  
BOARD OF SELECTMEN  
March 16, 2016**

**Present:** First Selectman Melissa M. Mack, Tim Reynolds, Joanne Sullivan, Krystal Holmes and Mel Chafetz.

Fire Chief Chuck Flynn was also in attendance. First Selectman Mack called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

**Approval of the Minutes from the March 2, 2016 Regular Meeting of the Board of Selectmen**

First Selectman Mack apologized for the minutes being late. Selectman Chafetz made a motion to table the approval of the minutes from March 2, 2016 Regular Meeting of the Board of Selectmen until next meeting in order for the Selectmen to fully review. Vote 5-0 in favor.

**Approval of the Minutes from the February 25, 2016 Special Meeting of the Board of Selectmen**

First Selectman Mack amended the minutes from the February 25, 2016 Special Meeting to remove “First” before Selectman Reynolds in paragraph 6, “First” before Selectman Chafetz in paragraph 10 and to correct the spelling on p. 4 from “slaries” to “salaries”.

Selectman Holmes asked whether the 2016-2017 budget had been voted on and requested that the Board of Selectmen do so. The Selectmen discussed whether the budget required a vote. First Selectman Mack reviewed that she asked for a vote but the Selectmen declined to do so and told her to proceed with making reductions as they discussed and present the results to the Board of Finance at the budget meeting the following Monday. First Selectman Mack said she would add voting on the budget she originally submitted to the Board of Finance at the next Board of Selectman meeting on April 6, 2016. Selectman Reynolds made the motion to approve the minutes from the February 25, 2016 Special Meeting of the Board of Selectmen. Vote 5-0 in favor.

**Public Comment**

Tom Frenaye, 489 Warnertown Road, spoke regarding the new procedure for board and commission appointments. He would like First Selectman Mack to rethink it. First Selectmen Mack responded that this topic would be discussed later in the meeting.

Dave Gauthier, 3219 Phelps Road, noted that the Board of Selectmen are required, by March 1, 2016, to vote on the budget before bringing to Board of Finance and this has not been done according to Board of Selectmen Regular Meeting minutes.

First Selectman Mack requested a motion to rearrange the current agenda in order to move item #7 FEMA Safer Grant to item #4. Selectman Sullivan so moved. Vote 5-0 in favor.

### **Discussion and approval of request for FEMA SAFER Grant**

Fire Chief Flynn explained that through FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) and SAFER (Staffing for Adequate Fire Emergency Response) the Town can apply for a grant which will cover two years of salary and benefits for an additional firefighter for a total of \$157,000. There is no Town funding match required on the grant; however, it does not fund overtime which would be the responsibility of the Town. The grant also allows Suffield, as a combination department, to apply for \$12,000 for retention of volunteers to offset volunteer training costs and seminars.

Chief Flynn explained that his goal is to have, at a minimum, two people on every truck from career staff and the remaining as after hours and volunteer for the safety of firefighters at the station and on any fire responses they do for the Town. First Selectman Mack took an additional firefighter out of the Selectmens budget.

The Fire Commission voted 2-2 last week on whether to submit the grant application; however, First Selectman Mack asked that it be submitted to the Selectmen. Selectman Reynolds asked if the Town had ever applied for this grant in the past. Chief Flynn believed the Town had, but backed out because the grant required the firefighter to be guaranteed for three years after the end of the grant funding. The current grant does not require any retention after the end of the grant funding.

First Selectman Mack supports applying for the grant if after the two years of grant funding, the burden switches to the Fire Department to prove with data that the addition of a firefighter 1) has not adversely impacted the volunteer firefighter base; 2) public and firefighter safety has improved; and 3) how our fire department compares to peer towns in size and geographic area. First Selectman Mack noted there is no cost to town other than overtime and the risk of unemployment compensation at the end of two years if the Town decides not to retain the position. Chief Flynn will come up with a matrix to prove the data on why we need the firefighter to justify retention. The Town has retained management rights within the firefighter union contract and may eliminate a position if it is not needed.

Selectman Reynolds asked what local towns have for number of fire fighters. Chief Flynn said the days of leaving your job as a volunteer to fight a fire are gone. Selectman Chafetz noted difficulty that comes with hiring a volunteer to paid position, keeping him for two years, him making relationships and then potentially not being hired after the two years. Chief Flynn said there will be some attrition due to likely retirements in the next few years which may help address that issue. Chief Flynn noted that OSHA sets limits for junior volunteers making it more difficult to use 18+ years high school volunteers. Selectman Holmes asked about EMS having “booming” volunteer basis and

wondered if Fire Department could learn from them. Chief Flynn noted the biggest difference is that the Fire Department does not have sleeping quarters so we are limited to firefighters who reside in town. Selectman Reynolds said that even if we get this grant, Board of Selectmen would still have to accept it. Selectman Holmes is concerned as to why the fire commission was divided. First Selectman Mack said there are two board members who feel we don't need a new firefighter stating that we have enough in relation to surrounding towns. They are not giving as much weight to the recommendations from the International Firefighters Association regarding firefighter safety standards. Only four commissioners attended the Fire Commission meeting which resulted in a split vote and the motion did not pass.

Selectman Reynolds made the motion to approve the submission of a FEMA SAFER Grant for the purpose described and recommend to the Board of Finance.  
Vote 4-0 in favor. Selectman Holmes abstained.

**Discussion and approval of Tax Ordinance to abate up to 50% of the property taxes of (1) dairy farm, (2) fruit orchard, (3) vegetable farm, (4) nursery farm, (5) any farm which employs nontraditional farming methods, including, but not limited to, hydroponic farming, (6) tobacco farms, and recommend to Board of Finance**

First Selectman Mack introduced Joe Geremia of Four Seasons Farms. Four Seasons Farms is currently looking to build a hydroponic tomato farm (indoor growing) on Poole Road. Mr. Geremia explained that his group chose Suffield because of flat land and the town's willingness to work with farmers. The land currently under consideration is a total of 90 acres. The project is slated to be done in phases. Phase 1 includes 11 acres of greenhouses which would be used for raising tomatoes 10 months out of the year. Growing will be suspended during the summer months to not compete with our local traditional farmers. The possibility of cucumber and basil growing may be considered at a later date. Upon completion of all phases, the goal is to have 45 acres of green house. Four Seasons Farms plan to purchase the land, as opposed to leasing. The Zoning and Planning Commission has approved this plan. Selectman Chafetz inquired as to how many trucks would be involved in the farming project. Mr. Geremia responded by stating that there would be 3 trucks per day in the initial phase. Selectman Chafetz wanted to know how this number would be affected as they expanded their operations. Mr. Geremia projected approximately 8 trucks per day when all phases have been completed. First Selectman Mack wanted to know if Mr. Geremia could provide a comparison of traffic levels between the proposed hydroponic tomato farm and the traffic currently generated by the Baker Nurseries. Mr. Geremia responded by explaining that he had discussed this with Baker Nurseries and their traffic is "double to triple" the amount of traffic that the hydroponic tomato farm would be generating.

Mr. Geremia explained that the unique thing about growing indoors is that it saves on water and labor. First Selectman Mack noted that the group is looking at utilizing sustainable energy as well. First Selectman Mack noted the concern regarding the

potential of light pollution from the greenhouses. Modern commercial greenhouses are designed with blackout curtains to be energy and cost efficient, retaining as much light as possible within the greenhouse. First Selectman Mack noted that Four Seasons Farms has been very accommodating to the Town's concerns siting as an example their willingness to adjust the height of their proposed water tower. Selectman Chafetz asked how the elimination of fertilizers would be handled. Mr. Geremia explained that their process has zero percent runoff as they collect and reuse the water from two wells. Mr. Selectman Sullivan asked where the tomatoes would be sent once they are produced. Mr. Geremia stated that the tomatoes will be grown mostly for local consumption, although some would also go to Massachusetts, New York and New Jersey.

First Selectman Mack asked for a brief overview of what this endeavor means for Suffield from an economic development standpoint. Mr. Geremia explained that not a lot of towns support and understand farming. Other towns will use Suffield's data to encourage the possibility of hydroponic farming in their communities, but producers will flock to Suffield. Selectman Chafetz asked how many employees they plan on hiring. Mr. Geremia stated that as soon as they break ground they will begin hiring about 40 people. Selectman Chafetz noted that the Town has an Agricultural program at Suffield High School and he wondered if there would be training and/or employment opportunities for those students. Mr. Geremia responded by noting that education on hydroponic farming and training will be a big part of the greenhouse's plan, but they have not talked to Suffield High School yet.

First Selectman Mack summarized that this industry is an excellent opportunity to increase Suffield's commercial tax base; further invest in Suffield's agricultural community; and provide Suffield's current farmers with a market for their farms. The Town is well positioned for greenhouse operations because we have existing greenhouse zoning regulations, which many towns do not have. The next step is to create a known and publicized tax structure that supports this growing industry. Helen Tetz, Suffield Assessor, working with First Selectman Mack, propose expanding the tax abatement program currently available to dairy farmers.

Ms. Tetz reported that Conn. Gen. Stat. Sec. 12-81m is an optional municipal abatement provision, which Suffield enacted exclusively for dairy farmers in 1992. In order to assist Four Seasons Farm and encourage other existing farmers to expand and upgrade their operations, we propose expanding the abatement to all Suffield farmers. The current program abates 50% of property taxes from dairy farm acreage and farm buildings, but excludes their residential lot, residence and tenant residences on the property. Farm vehicles are considered personal property and are not covered by this program.

Ms. Tetz explained the spreadsheet she provided to the Selectmen illustrating the tax revenue impact on the Town if the ordinance is expanded as proposed. After Four Seasons' first phase of construction, possible tax revenue from Four Seasons and other qualifying farms is estimated at \$156,393, or \$78,197 at a full 50% abatement. One

option is to phase in the abatement over several years to lessen the impact on the Town as Four Seasons fully phases in its operations. Looking at new taxes coming in and possible abatement, in the first year the Town would incur an approximate loss of \$12,000 in potential tax dollars at twenty-five percent abatement. First Selectman Mack noted that there are a lot of assumptions in their projections. In the worst case scenario, they assumed that all farms apply and all are eligible. Ms. Totz noted that in order to qualify for abatement all other taxes owed to the Town have to be current (property, motor vehicle, etc.). Although phasing in abatement for additional farms, the Town would grandfather dairy farm abatement at the full fifty percent level. Selectman Reynolds noted that the Town will experience a small negative even after all phases are implemented. Selectman Chafetz asked if we could offer this tax incentive only to Four Seasons. Selectman Reynolds did not advise that approach. First Selectman Mack felt that would be akin to spot zoning. At the current mill rate, Ms. Totz noted that the estimated tax increase for the next fiscal year is over \$546,000 so we would not “gain” only that \$11,000. First Selectman Mack noted that we were talking in phases and not years and asked Four Seasons how many years to phase in completely. Selectman Reynolds wanted to know if we could take another meeting to think about how to structure the phase in.

Any proposed ordinance requires a Town Meeting and would affect the 2016 grand list at the earliest. Board of Finance members noted that they are in favor in principal, prefer the phase in of the abatement and look forward to seeing specific projections.

Ms. Totz explained that the Town has the right to recoup taxes paid upon sale if the property is not continuing operation as a farm. Selectman Sullivan asked how many farms we have in Suffield that qualify if we expand the ordinance to all farms. Ms. Totz said about 35 additional farms of various sizes should be able to qualify. Director of Economic Development, Patrick McMahon confirmed the goal by Planning and Zoning that 55% of all residential property would be preserved for open space and this would help with that goal. Jeff Leichtman of Four Seasons noted that this perfectly positions Suffield because of land availability, flatness and the availability of natural gas. First Selectman Mack said we will market the attractiveness of Suffield to other greenhouse operations.

Selectman Reynolds made the motion to table Tax Ordinance to abate up to 50% of the property taxes of (1) dairy farm, (2) fruit orchard, (3) vegetable farm, (4) nursery farm, (5) any farm which employs nontraditional farming methods, including, but not limited to, hydroponic farming, (6) tobacco farms, until next meeting on April 6, 2016. Vote 5-0 in favor.

### **Approval of the submission of the Federal Transit Administration Section 5310 Enhanced Mobility of Seniors & Individuals with Disabilities Grant**

Paula Pascoe, Director for Social Services, will be applying for the Federal Transit Administration Section 5310 Enhanced Mobility of Seniors & Individuals with

Disabilities Grant. First Selectman Mack noted that the Town is currently eligible to apply in order to replace Bus 16. The “useful life requirement” for replacement vehicles is 4 years or 100,000 miles. Bus 16 is currently 7 years old with 112,000 miles. This grant is structured as an 80/20 grant. The Federal Transit Administration will give 80 percent of the amount requested and the Town must match the 20 percent plus any additional money should the vehicle cost more than the amount initially requested. Director Pascoe plans to speak with the individual who currently handles the State contract to procure vehicles using an FTA compliant competitive process. This will ensure that her request is as accurate as possible and she will also include a 5 percent contingency. At this point, the estimate for the grant is \$56,000. The Town’s portion is \$11,200 and will come from the Mini Bus Reserve Fund. Robert Brooks, Chair of Social Services Commission, was in attendance and said the new vehicle will be smaller, more fuel efficient and has space for one wheelchair. First Selectman Mack said Director Pascoe is adding this item to ACCE as a late submission.

Selectman Chafetz made the motion to approve the submission of the Federal Transit Administration Section 5310 Enhanced Mobility of Seniors & Individuals with Disabilities Grant and recommend to Board of Finance. Vote 5-0 in favor.

**Approve a tax rebate for First National Bank of Suffield in the amount of \$3,299.99 due to double payment**

Selectman Holmes made the motion to approve a tax rebate for First National Bank of Suffield in the amount of \$3,299.99 due to double payment. Vote 4-0 in favor. Selectman Reynolds abstained due to conflict of interest.

**Appointment of Kathleen Powers to North Central Regional Mental Health Board for a term of one year**

First Selectman Mack explained that the North Central Regional Mental Health Board supplies advocacy to the state for mental health issues. This appointment was reviewed by both the Republic Town Committee and the Democratic Town Committee with additional submissions. Mrs. Powers has relevant experience with a background in social work and psychology.

Selectman Reynolds made the motion to appoint Kathleen Powers to the North Central Regional Mental Health Board for a term of one year. Vote 5-0 in favor.

**Discuss and accept changes to draft of 2014-15 Annual Report**

First Selectman Mack initiated the discussion by noting that a third party currently produces the Town of Suffield Annual Report. First Selectman Mack recommended that moving forward the production of the Annual Reports should be brought in-house and the process started earlier and managed to comply with the Town Charter’s deadline.

Selectman Chafetz questioned the square footage being reported on the Windsor Marketing Group building. Director of Economic Development Patrick McMahon explained that he thought the difference was due to mezzanine space. Selectman Chafetz also noted that the narcotics line item was being reflected as a decrease while the state was reflecting a large increase. He questioned whether this could be a typographical error. This line item will be reviewed and information will be confirmed. Selectman Sullivan noted a typographical error on page 16 under Dr. Chafetz's photo where the caption contained an incorrect spelling for "Bridge Street."

### **Open Public Hearing on 2014-15 Annual Report on Wednesday, March 23rd**

The 2014-15 Annual Report with accepted changes will be posted on the Town website ([www.suffieldtownhall.com](http://www.suffieldtownhall.com)) on Wednesday, March 23, 2016. Residents will be allowed to review the document and suggest changes until Friday, April 1, 2016 at which time the document will be removed in order for final changes to be made.

Selectman Reynolds moved to open the Public Hearing for the 2014/15 Annual Report on Wednesday, March 23<sup>rd</sup> and closing on April 1st. The Public Hearing will be closed at the next Board of Selectmen meeting on April 6, 2016. Vote 5-0 in favor.

### **Joint Cooperative Agreement with Town of Ellington**

First Selectman Mack requested a motion be made to add the Joint Cooperative Agreement with the Town of Ellington to the agenda. Selectman Holmes so moved. Vote 5-0 in favor.

Economic Development Director Patrick McMahon presented the Joint Cooperative Agreement with the Town of Ellington by explaining that Suffield has participated with the Towns of Ellington, Windsor Locks and Somers in a housing rehabilitation program offered by the Small Cities Community Development Block Grant Program for several years. The program is operated and administered by Ellington. Income-eligible Suffield residents may obtain housing rehabilitation loans at a 0% interest rate deferred until the house is sold to conduct repairs to their homes. These are federal funds that are passed through to the State of Connecticut for award to residents of the Towns. Ellington is applying for between \$450,000 and \$550,000 in grant funds for this project, which has not been funded in the last two years. Referrals come from EDC or Suffield Emergency Aid Association. There are currently four Suffield houses on the waiting list for funding. There would be no financial impact on the Town.

Selectman Reynolds made a motion to authorize the First Selectman to enter into and execute the Joint Cooperative Agreement by and between the Town of Ellington and the Town of Suffield and to take all other actions necessary regarding joint participation in the Ellington Housing Rehabilitation Program, to be funded through Connecticut Small Cities Community Development Block Grant Program. Vote 5-0 in favor.

## **Selectmen Updates**

### **Commission Updates**

Director of Finance Deb Cerrato, Town Treasurer Christine Davidson, Board of Finance Chair Justin Donnelly and Board of Finance member Chris Childs joined First Selectman Mack in conducting bond counsel interviews and have chosen the firm of Updike, Kelly & Spellacy. This choice will result in significant savings to the Town of Suffield. First Selectman Mack negotiated the fees resulting in two bond issuances for approximately \$24,000. Due to potential conflicts of interest, First Selectman Mack did not participate in the vote to select bond counsel.

The Permanent Building Commission will discuss the Bridge Street School Community Center environmental abatement on Thursday night, March 17, 2016. There will be a Tri-Board Special Meeting to discuss next steps and financing on April 5, 2016 @ 7 p.m. The location of the meeting is still to be determined, however, the most likely location will be the Suffield Senior Center.

Selectman Holmes requested a discussion surrounding the new policy and procedures for appointments to Boards and Commissions. First Selectman Mack stressed the importance of publicizing openings as they occur which will allow new people who want to participate in town government an opportunity to get involved. First Selectman Mack stressed that recommendations to town boards will be based on candidates that possess a skill set needed on a particular commission. Her recommendation is that when there is an opening, the Republican Town Committee and the Democratic Town Committee chairs will be consulted. Additionally, the openings will be posted on the town website as well as being publicized by additional electronic methods. With a broadened search scope, the hope is that some residents who are not members of a specific party will come forward and apply. Applicants will be required to submit resumes for consideration. Current Boards, Committees and Commissions are currently being reviewed to determine what the needs are, what skill sets are required and how the current members are currently serving these positions. The goal of this new method is to insure that the process is fair, open and inclusive. The most qualified candidates will be selected to represent each position.

The Town of Suffield currently has no limit on the number of terms an individual can serve on a Board, Committee or Commission. First Selectman Mack recommended having all appointed board and commission members submit resumes for reevaluation by the Board of Selectman when their terms (mostly 4 years) are up and also solicit additional candidates for the position. This would be done with recommendations by the particular commission chair.

Discussion ensued on this topic, including the value of institutional knowledge gained by long-serving members, allowing the commission chair to determine when members should be offered another term automatically or subject to competition from other candidates, the value of input by

the town political committee chairs, the need for new perspectives and ideas and not simply “doing things as we’ve always done”, the awkward position it places commission chairs to have to recommend not reappointing a member with whom they serve; the disincentive to volunteers to have to “reapply” for their job.

First Selectman Mack is trying to design a procedure that is fair and consistently applied to all interested parties. Selectman Chafetz, Reynolds and Sullivan did not want to have current commission members have to reapply for expired positions. The Board of Selectman decided to approach on case by case basis, working with chair, whether an appointment will be renewed.

Selectman Chafetz brought up the issues of resumes not being submitted to the Board of Selectmen for appointments. First Selectman Mack said she has been waiting on other candidates who have expressed their desire to be considered for the same positions. None of the current vacancies are hindering the ability of the board, commissions or committees to act. The plan is to address additional appointments at the next Board of Selectmen Meeting. First Selectman Mack finished by saying if we are going to make lifetime appointments we should make sure they are good appointments.

First Selectman Chafetz spoke about the Library Commission waiting on Environmental Protection Agency Air Quality test. He also mentioned that although the Library Commission is still waiting on a resolution of seating issues in the auditorium it will not prevent them from moving back into the building.

First Selectman Chafetz judged at the Science Fair for kids throughout the state. He noted that there are “some pretty bright kids out there.”

### **Public Comment**

*No Comment*

First Selectman Mack asked for a motion to enter executive session regarding discussion of Director of Economic Development. Selectmen Reynolds so moved. Vote 5-0 in favor. Executive session convened at 8:58 p.m. and included the Board of Selectmen; Director of Economic Development Patrick McMahon; Board of Finance members Justin Donnelly, Eric Harrington, Ryan Anderson and Ann Huntington-Mickelson; Economic Development Commission members Howard Orr and Gloria Smith.

At 10:00 p.m. Executive Session ended.

The next regular Board of Selectmen Meeting will be Wednesday, April 6, 2016 at 7:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Kim Worthington

Recording Secretary